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Mr. Bryan May

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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● (1245)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Welcome, everybody. Pursuant to an order of reference on Thursday, February 1, 2018, the committee is resuming clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-62, an act to amend the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Act and other acts.

Madam Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): It's a bit unusual for me to step in like this at the end of process, but my colleague Karine Trudel had to go back to her riding.

However, she has introduced three amendments that really are essentially the same. I assure you I won't make the same arguments three times. I'll state them once, and you can consider them valid for all three amendments. You need only copy and paste them in your mind.

The amendment proposed by my colleague was requested during testimony by Ursula Hendel, president of the Association of Justice Counsel, and Chris Aylward, national president of the Canadian Public Service Alliance.

The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that the bill is constitutional. In a judgment rendered in 2015, the Supreme Court held that Saskatchewan's essential services legislation was unconstitutional. As provisions of that act contains wording similar to that of clause 9 of Bill C-62, the amendment concerns pages 35 and 36 on page 5.

The purpose of the provision is to ensure that non-union personnel are not disadvantaged during a strike or subjected to pressures to which they would normally be exposed during a work stoppage.

These lines appear word for word in the Saskatchewan act. Their wording was cited by the court, which held that, if qualified personnel are available to deliver requisite services, it should not matter that they are non-union personnel. Consequently, the provision works at cross purposes to ensuring uninterrupted delivery of essential services during a work stoppage.

In conclusion, I would say these amendments address the concern that Bill C-62 does not sufficiently reflect the Supreme Court judgment rendered in 2015. The bill should therefore be amended.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any further discussion on the amendment that's been proposed by Madam Sansoucy?

I see no further discussion. Okay. We have a choice. We could get started now or we could suspend until the minister arrives. Do we have a decision?

We're going to wait until after the minister arrives and do clause-by-clause after.

Madam Sansoucy, do you have any further comments before we suspend?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: No.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to suspend. The minister is scheduled to arrive at one o'clock. If he arrives at 12:55, we're going to get started right away.

● (1250)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1255)

The Chair: Welcome back, everybody.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), this committee will consider the main estimates 2018-2019: vote 1 under Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, vote 1 under Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, and votes 1 and 5 under Department of Employment and Social Development, referred to the committee on Monday, April 16, 2018.

We are very pleased to be joined once again by the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, as well as the department officials.

We're going to get right into it for the first six minutes.

Monsieur Blaney, please.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As vice-chair, I want to join with our chair in welcoming you, minister. We are pleased to welcome you to the committee as part of our analysis and approval of certain budgetary appropriations.

Without further ado, I will proceed with my questions.

On September 6, 2016, you made a commitment on Radio-Canada public television to resolve a situation that had dragged on for decades and involved thousands of workers suffering from serious diseases. Those workers are currently entitled to 15 weeks of benefits payable in the event of serious illness. During the election campaign, the government and you personally made a commitment to resolve that situation. I'm thinking, for example, of Marie-Hélène Dubé, whom you met a few weeks ago and told that you were working on the matter.

Are you now undertaking to meet the commitment that the government and you yourself made to resolve this situation more than two years ago? If so, when will you do it?

I know you are doing a lot of good things, but I would like to hear your response on the specific issue of the 15 weeks of payable benefits. When will you respectfully treat employment insurance claimants who are suffering from a serious illness?

● (1300)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would be remiss not to say how happy I am to see you again. Unfortunately, we have been separated from one another in recent weeks as a result of the intense work we have had to do in the House of Commons and the efforts you have been making for many months to address issues that are important for our government and for everyone around this table.

As you said so well, Mr. Blaney, my colleague and member for the riding adjacent to my own, I am still fortunate to be surrounded by very hard-working senior officials.

I will begin by answering your question by providing a general employment insurance framework. It is a framework that, at the same time, indicates the extent to which—

Hon. Steven Blaney: Pardon me, minister. As we were interrupted the last time, I would ask you please to answer my question. You made a commitment on public television to do something. Is the promise of 15 weeks an empty one, or are you actually going to resolve this matter? If so, when? Can you answer that question? If not, I have other questions for you. We've already heard your presentation. I would like an answer to my question, please, minister.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I was about to discuss two promises that we have made. The first was made in 2015. We said we would not only repair some of the damage done by Mr. Harper's Conservative government—

Hon. Steven Blaney: Minister, if you don't want to answer the question, I'll ask you others. In that case, I will understand that you have refused to answer the question.

Do you undertake to extend the 15 weeks of employment insurance for persons suffering from a serious illness? If you want to evade the question, that's fine, but I have other important questions for you. I don't want to hear any hollow words or pat phrases. I would appreciate it if you would stick to the subject, sir.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'm prepared to answer the question, which is very important. Canadians and the members of this committee must clearly understand how we have worked over the past two years and what we intend to do for the rest of our mandate.

Out of respect for all the Canadians listening to us and for the work of this committee, I have an obligation to discuss the framework within which—

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, minister. I see you don't want to answer the question. Now I'll ask you another one.

We're here to approve budgetary appropriations. The Canada Summer Jobs program is discussed on page 56 of budget 2018. Do you think it's normal that 20 members of your party allocated funding to entities that support terrorist organizations that make homophobic remarks and support anti-semitism?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Not only should you insist that the many young people in our ridings receive the financial support we have allocated to them and that they take advantage of the opportunity we afford them to work and acquire invaluable skills, you also have an obligation to do so.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Absolutely, minister.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: As you've probably noted as well—and if you haven't, I'm going to inform you about it—starting in 2016, we doubled the number of jobs available to young Canadians to assist them at a time in their lives when they are a little more financially strapped and to give them the opportunity to develop their skills. In this way, they will become workers who can contribute to our economic growth and social development.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I'm very familiar with the Canada Summer Jobs program, minister. However, 20 Liberal members have provided funding to organizations that have made homophobic remarks.

Were those remarks made consciously? Were the members aware they were funding organizations that support terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, or was this a form of rank incompetence?

You have also put a certification process in place specifically to ensure compliance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. How is it that 20 Liberal MPs have funded organizations associated with terrorist groups that make absolutely unthinkable comments in 2018?

● (1305)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: These are in fact job opportunities that are both significant and increasingly available in our society as a result of the considerable support the Canadian government has provided in the past two years.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Minister, since I have only 10 seconds left, I would ask you to—

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: If you would like more specific details, you will have to speak respectfully to my colleague Patricia Hajdu.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Canadians are entitled to know whether the appropriations we approve today will be indirectly allocated to terrorist entities.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair—

[*English*]

The Chair: Gentlemen, I'm afraid that's time.

Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister Duclos, for coming in today.

I'm going to be sharing my time with MP Ruimy.

Mr. Minister, I am, as I know you are, very proud of the historic investments that our government has made in affordable housing. After a decade in which the Harper Conservatives really did nothing to address the housing crisis, and off-loaded responsibility to the provinces and municipalities, it's refreshing to see our federal government taking a leadership role in the national housing strategy.

A few weeks ago you announced the creation of a $13-billion co-investment fund with the provinces and territories. This is great news for my riding of Saint John—Rothesay. As you announced, this fund will be delivered in tandem with the recently created $3.75-billion rental construction financing initiative, and the $208.3-million affordable housing innovation fund. Combined, these three initiatives represent an investment of over $17.15 billion in the construction of new affordable housing units.

Can you break down for this committee how the $17-billion investment will ensure that more Canadians in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay will have a place to call home?

Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: You know, Wayne, how proud and how pleased I was of your very early engagement on this file, when both of us started our new careers as MPs. It made a big difference. You'll remember I went to visit your riding. You introduced me to all the wonderful community organizations that make such a big difference in the lives of people in your community and in your riding.

Not being partisan, I want to commend you and encourage you to continue that hard work.

You mentioned affordable and safe housing, and an affordable and safe home is key for Canadians to live well. It's also key for communities to be inclusive, where everyone has the opportunity to participate in the growth of the economy, and where everyone has the ability to benefit from that growth in our economy.

To be homeless is probably the greatest source of human deprivation that we can imagine in Canada, and you have said very clearly that we've never had a national housing strategy. That's another example of non-partisanship. For the last 25 years individual Canadians and organizations have been asking the federal government for a national housing strategy. It's going to decrease by more than half a million the number of Canadian families living in homes that are either unaffordable or unsafe.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Minister.

I'm going to share my time with MP Ruimy.

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for being with us today and talking about the national housing strategy.

I remember I was actually one of the first ones to hold a consultation in my riding about a year and a half ago. When we looked at what was happening, we saw that in the previous decade, housing and homelessness had skyrocketed. More specifically, in my riding we used to have a youth shelter, which was no longer funded because there wasn't any money there and funds had been shifted into another project.

Going through the national housing strategy and all the consultations that have gone on, what can you tell me, for the folks in my riding who are struggling to find a youth shelter, about how this program helps with developing a youth shelter?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Dan.

You know, and I think we all know, that to see young Canadians or women living in circumstances of family violence, or indigenous Canadians with handicaps and disabilities, or Canadians with mental health issues and addiction issues living in unaffordable and unsafe housing, or finding themselves on the streets, means that Canadians.... One homeless Canadian is too many in our society. This type of investment is.... In fact, we have increased for the first time in 20 years the budget of the homelessness partnering strategy.

We're going to invest $2.2 billion over the next 10 years to support housing investments that will make a difference in the lives of many Canadians and reduce chronic homelessness by at least 50%.

● (1310)

Mr. Dan Ruimy: You were in one of our cities, Victoria, which has major homelessness issues, making an announcement recently.

Could you tell us about that announcement?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That's a wonderful example of a partnership. I call this the triple-P agenda—people, places, and partnership. It's people because we need to be mindful of middle-class Canadians and lower-income Canadians who struggle in life and have difficulty finding safe and affordable housing; places because we want to make sure that our investments in housing complement other investments we're making in public transit, in green infrastructure, in training, in skills, and innovation; and partnership, because we know, as you have noted in Victoria, that when we work together, we make immense changes.

The Victoria mayor and all her community have declared that, with those housing investments and homelessness investments, that they will make homelessness history in Victoria quite soon because of partnership.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, minister. It's always a pleasure to speak with you. Not surprisingly, I am going to talk to you about seniors and workers.

In preparing my questions for today, I realized I would have preferred to talk to you about the employment insurance reform you previously tabled. I would have preferred to talk about the poverty eradication strategy that has already been presented. I would have preferred to talk about the guaranteed income supplement that would already have been automatic for everyone. However, that is not the case.

In response to a question from my colleague about employment insurance, you said you intended to repair the damage from the 10 years when the Conservatives were in power. I would like you to go back much further than that because the Liberal government began to change the nature of the employment insurance program in 1996. That program is no longer the social security net it should be and has abandoned the primary mission it had when it was created in the 1950s.

We should not overlook the fact that the federal government has not contributed a cent to the employment insurance fund since the 1990s. That's why the employment insurance reform must achieve much more than merely undo what the Conservatives have done. Ultimately, they merely consolidated the Liberal reform of 1996.

As you know, I have addressed you many times in question period about the guaranteed income supplement and sickness benefits. And, by the way, I'm going to go back to the black hole. I have also questioned your parliamentary secretary several times during adjournment debates. Every time, your fine words have caused considerable frustration among workers, from New Brunswick and elsewhere, who still find themselves in a black hole. Things have come to the point where I have to ask you questions and say a prayer because we no longer know what to do with these families that have nothing to eat.

Every time, there are reactions related to sick persons, and matters have come to such a point that doctors in my riding call me because they have patients who want to go back to work after exhausting their 15 weeks of benefits, despite the fact they have to continue treatment. I was told during an adjournment debate that a minority of people were in that situation. And yet, according to the information we have obtained, 30% of sick persons exhaust their 15 weeks of benefits. It was not for no reason that I gave that press conference with Marie-Hélène Dubé, who wanted to meet you, and that I introduced that motion, which we have not even debated here.

I am thinking about all those people who call me about your answers. Sixty per cent of people who have contributed to employment insurance all their lives are not even eligible to receive it. They tell me they're not even entitled to a single week of benefits.

The committee is conducting a study on learning. Young people have unstable employment and never manage to accumulate enough hours. Yes, we are experiencing full employment, but some people are still experiencing unstable employment, and I no longer know what to tell them or how to respond to them.

Consequently, my questions will concern matters that I would have liked to see resolved. Soon you will be entering the fourth year of your mandate, and what I am talking to you about is set out in your mandate letter. I find it unfortunate that I'm asking you these questions at the start of that fourth year.

As my colleague mentioned, on September 6, 2016, you were invited to appear on *Le Téléjournal*. In response to a question, you said this would happen following year. You even expanded on that later in the interview, saying that the answer was very clear and that you had not lost sight of the issue. That's what you said, minister.

My question is very simple. When will you keep your promise to review sickness benefits, bearing in mind these people who currently have no income and who must devote their energy to getting better rather than to paying their bills?

● (1315)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Ms. Sansoucy.

You know how much I appreciate your work, your vision, and your support for many measures that we have put in place. However, I regret the fact that your long preamble contained a number of inaccuracies and incorrect statements.

You asked a question at the end and hoped I would answer it by merely avoiding—

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I can ask you questions about the black hole and the guaranteed income supplement if you wish. You can answer them all together.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: One of the things you said about the guaranteed income supplement is inaccurate. We improved that program starting in the first year. Moreover, I look at my colleagues —

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Is everyone now receiving it automatically?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: We did that, and we also know it's important to pay good benefits to seniors and that they must be properly and respectfully received by seniors.

In January 2018, for the first time in the history of the Canadian government, we implemented an automatic registration system for the guaranteed income supplement. FADOC had been calling for that for a long time.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: However, that only concerns persons who have turned 65 since January 1st.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That's a major step forward, although I agree it's not enough.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Not everyone has turned 65 since January 1st.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That's correct.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Sansoucy, I apologize. I have to step in. We are over time. We have to stick to the time today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I'll have some speaking time later. I'll come back to this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have MP Fortier, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will be sharing my speaking time with Mr. Morrissey.

Good afternoon, minister. Thank you for being with us today.

I see that the expenses of the old age security program and the guaranteed income supplement, the GIS, have risen. I suppose that's because of the increase in the GIS and the rising population of seniors over 65 years of age.

Bearing that in mind, can you give us your take on the last report we prepared on seniors and tell us what you will be doing to advance the seniors file, which is very important?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you for your hard work, Ms. Fortier. You are one of the last people to join us, and we very much appreciate all the work you have done to date.

The seniors file has been very important over the past two years. As you know, we began by acknowledging that seniors, particularly the most vulnerable and those who live alone, are finding it hard to make ends meet. They often have to make choices whether to buy medication, pay their rent, buy good food, or take part in the life of their community. The cost of living is constantly rising for seniors, and we have acknowledged that fact from the outset.

We have invested funding and assisted 900,000 vulnerable seniors in Canada. I'm going to take advantage of the fact that my colleague Steven Blaney is here to tell him that 4,000 seniors in his riding have received an increase in the guaranteed income supplement. I will also point out to my colleague Mark Warawa that 1,300 seniors in his riding have received an increase of up to $950. That's a significant difference. For people who are better off, $950 a year may not seem like much, but it makes a significant difference for seniors who, every day, find it hard to make ends meet.

In addition, we have expanded the Canada pension plan and invested in the national housing strategy, which will increase seniors' ability to house themselves properly and safely.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Morrissey, with whom I'm sharing my speaking time.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you.

I would like to reference rhetoric, but in terms of the former government, unfortunately this was not rhetoric. It was actually the draconian action of the Conservative government in its cuts to Service Canada that significantly impacted the delivery of those key services to the unemployed and people applying for the Canada pension and the suite of very important programs that Service Canada delivers. Those drastic cuts were felt disproportionately in the Far North, for indigenous people, in the rural parts of the country, especially to those who are vulnerable, the unemployed.

Could you briefly explain to the committee how our government has moved to reverse those draconian cuts?

● (1320)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you very much. It's also still a pleasure to work with you, Mr. Morrissey.

[*English*]

I'll just give one example of how significant the work of the government and the work of MPs, some of them around this table, has been when it comes to supporting Service Canada's quality standards.

In 2016, we launched a service quality review for how the federal government could be respectful in dealing with Canadians, and particularly Canadians who have lost their jobs, unemployed Canadians, facing very significant stress, income challenges, being able to feed their family. The problem is that under the former Service Canada standards of the former Harper Conservatives, only 30% of unemployed workers could talk to an agent. That meant that 70% of unemployed Canadians, finding themselves in very stressful conditions, could not talk to a Service Canada agent.

We've changed that with the help and assistance of people, some of whom are in this room, with the service quality review. We're now almost at 70%, and we're going to improve that further because we believe that Canadians require, deserve, and expect the support that Service Canada agents and the Canadian government owes them.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now over to Ramesh, please.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming to the committee.

Regarding families and children, our government announced the creation of child benefits. The child benefit was given to Canadians in need of it, putting money into the pockets of Canadians tax free. Ninety per cent of Canadians are getting the benefit, and Minister, you were in my riding in Brampton last year, and you saw the people. They were excited. All over Canada people are excited regarding the Canada child benefit.

Last October, Finance Minister Morneau announced that child benefits will be indexed. That means when the cost of living goes higher, the Canada child benefit will be increased. I would like you to explain whether that plan is still in existence, and if so, the effect of indexing on middle-class people.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Ramesh, and thank you for mentioning the great time I had with you in Brampton, talking to middle-class and lower-income families who struggle every day when it comes to addressing the time pressures they have going to work and looking after their children and their education, but also making ends meet in an economy where prices increase.

On July 19, 2018, we'll celebrate a great anniversary, the second year of the Canada child benefit. The Canada child benefit is the most significant social policy innovation in a generation. It's changing the nature of this country. It's helping nine families out of 10 feed their families and help their children grow and learn.

That makes a huge difference when it comes to child poverty. Forty per cent of children living in poverty before 2016 are now being lifted out of poverty because of the Canada child benefit, and I know in Brampton it means a lot to all the middle-class and lower-income families for whom you work so hard every day, Ramesh. Thank you.

● (1325)

The Chair: You're sharing. You have about two minutes and 20 seconds left.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I'll jump right back in.

During the consultations we held for the national housing strategy, we heard certain things from people on the ground about mobility and subsidized pricing for staying in an apartment. We heard it was difficult for people to take that with them, and that prevented a lot of people from getting a job.

Could you tell us a little more about that, please?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you again, Dan, for being sensitive to the difficulties that Canadians have to pay their rent, which means they have to choose between living in a safe and affordable place and living in a place that is not conducive to good welfare and good development for themselves and their children.

In 2020 we'll launch the first-ever Canada housing benefit. That's going to help 300,000 families live in a home that is safe and affordable and to look after their children. That's going to give, on average, $2,500 per family per home, to make sure that we all have a reasonable and fair chance and a real chance to live decently in a proper home. For the first time ever, the federal government will help provinces and territories prevent homelessness and guarantee every family a safe and affordable home.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I know I don't probably have much time, but when I was doing these consultations as well, these are the things that we heard from the people on the ground, who work with the public who face these challenges. I'm proud we were able to put together these types of programs that are going to have a significant impact on the lives of low-income Canadians. I thank you for all the work you've done.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

I noticed that you congratulated all the Liberal members for their hard work, but Minister, I want to assure you that all members of this committee are working hard for Canadians. Madame Sansoucy—

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Oh, thank you.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I want to thank her for her hard work, and also Mr. Blaney, and I am working hard too, sir.

The Auditor General has also been working very hard for Canada, and he made a startling statement that the "measure of success" from this Liberal government has been "the amount of money spent, rather than improved outcomes", and I'm very concerned when we have the Auditor General saying that.

Mr. Blaney brought up some issues about the Canadian summer jobs program being used to fund anti-Semitic and hate activities. Your response was about substantive funding to our youth. That sounds like what the Auditor General is saying. Outcomes are more important, not how much money. You said there was more money to develop their skills, and important job opportunities. I would suggest, Minister, that having funding....

This the first year that the Canada summer jobs program has given opportunity with conditions. The applicants for this funding for Canada summer jobs have to attest that they agree with the government's core values. Their core values have to be the government's core values.

The government owns this. When money is being used for anti-Semitic hate purposes or funding terrorism, it is very concerning. The government just announced last week that it has spent $4.5 billion to buy the Kinder Morgan pipeline, after creating an environment of chaos, and through Canada summer jobs it is actually funding Dogwood. The Canada summer jobs program announcement in that application was to protest the Kinder Morgan pipeline. I'm very concerned that taxpayers' money is being used in this way.

A law professor at the University of Saskatchewan, Jason MacLean, said of the wording of the new core values test, "Notwithstanding the Prime Minister's backtracking, the language to me is overbroad." He said that the declaration would probably not survive a charter challenge "because it infringes on the fundamental right of freedom of religion and conscience in a way that is not justifiable." That was Jason MacLean.

John Ibbitson, with *The Globe and Mail*, wrote:

> Thousands of student summer-job grants, along with a brand-new community-service program, have been rendered unavailable to organizations and people of faith, thanks to an obnoxious new Liberal values oath.

Andrew Bennett, former ambassador for religious freedoms in Canada, said the Trudeau government is displaying "totalitarian" tendencies with its controversial changes to the student summer jobs program.

John Ivison of the *National Post* said that Scott Simms, the popular Newfoundland MP, was removed from his job as chair of fisheries, losing a salary bonus of $1,100, because he voted in favour of a Conservative motion. What was that motion? The motion was:

> That, in the opinion of the House, organizations that engage in non-political non-activist work, such as feeding the homeless, helping refugees, and giving kids an opportunity to go to camp, should be able to access Canada Summer Jobs funding regardless of their private convictions and regardless of whether or not they choose to sign the application attestation.

Minister, I'm very concerned that the Auditor General is saying that spending money doesn't mean results and that the restrictive opportunities the government is giving are not in the interest of Canada.

Minister, why did you vote against a motion that was fair, that said let's make it non-partisan, let's make it non-political, let's focus on results, and results that are good for Canadian youth so that they can get a job and have a great experience? Minister, why did you vote against that fair motion in the House?

● (1330)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mark, let me start with two apologies.

The first apology is that indeed I didn't recognize the hard work that you, Steven, and Rosemarie do every day in the House and in your constituencies. Of course, I mentioned Brigitte earlier, and I'll just say it again. We're delighted to have you in the House. You make our lives more lively and you make the work of the government better, because with a good opposition—and I'm not saying you're good every day—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: —we have a better government.

The second apology is that I should have mentioned indeed that the number of student jobs is 70,000. You talked about outcomes. It's 70,000 young Canadians who now have a job. It's double the number there was before 2016. Thank you for asking me about this, because 70,000 versus 35,000 is indeed a good indication of the significantly greater outcomes we're having with the current Canada summer jobs program.

Coming to the other aspects, as you know, it's very important for that project to ensure that the jobs being done and the mandates being fulfilled are in support of, and not in contradiction to, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That's why we expect all applications to meet those requirements, that they are in accordance with the fact that not the belief or the opinion but the actual job being done is in accordance with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. If that is not the case and if there is misleading information provided to the government, that will be reviewed and eventually perhaps reversed.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

The final word goes to Madam Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're going to continue our discussion, minister.

You said there were inaccuracies in my preamble. However, I view my role as that of a spokesperson. I am the spokesperson for those who suffer the consequences when measures are not taken.

Let's look at the facts, minister. Every year, FADOC prepares an insert in our local weekly. This year, my contribution to it was to write a column on the guaranteed income supplement. However, the fact is that many people called our riding office after my column was published. Seniors and family caregivers realized as they read the column that they or their caregivers who were entitled to the guaranteed income supplement were not receiving it. We helped them apply for it.

The other fact is that Marie-Hélène Dubé gathered 600,000 signatures from people who were concerned about the sickness benefits situation. The number of cancer cases is much higher than it used to be. The labour market situation is different. We must adapt our laws to the new labour market realities. That leads me to my next question, minister.

We're going to talk about the black hole. I know you're going to talk about the training program. I know you're going to tell me about what's happening in New Brunswick, where workers have access to benefits. However, workers are concerned about next winter because the measure you included in the last budget doesn't resolve the black hole situation. In fact, some people are concerned because their benefits are being extended, but they don't even know whether they will have accumulated enough hours to qualify for employment insurance next season. That's not including workers from Est-du-Québec who were told by their local employment centre that the training you mentioned didn't exist.

I don't know what to tell those workers who are still in the black hole. Furthermore, our committee has to examine the employment insurance pieces one at a time. That poses a problem when we establish our schedule because the House has asked us to look at benefits for parents who have lost a child. Personally, I'm asking the committee to study the situation regarding sick persons. However, we would not be talking about the black hole if a genuine in-depth reform of the employment insurance program was under way to respond to the new labour market realities, whether it be unstable or seasonal employment, which is really widespread in certain regions.

So I ask you my question once again: when will the employment insurance reform take place?

● (1335)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That's an excellent question, and I'm going to answer it by convincing you—but I think you're already convinced—of our vision for the employment insurance program and by going back to what we did at the outset.

At the outset, we reversed the discriminatory measures that had been applied against women and young people by Mr. Harper's Conservative government. We made a commitment to do it, and we did it quickly.

Approximately 50,000 unemployed workers received more respectful treatment after those discriminatory measures were reversed. Then we shortened the qualifying period from two weeks to one, which benefited 1.8 million Canadian unemployed workers, many of whom were engaged in seasonal work. In the last budget, we also offered more flexibility for workers in more difficult health and income situations who needed sickness benefits. That increased flexibility will therefore benefit several tens of thousands of those families that are in difficulty.

As for the black hole—as you may have noticed—for the first time in Canadian government history, specific funding to support our seasonal workers was included in budget 2018. That funding amounted to $10 million in very short-term assistance. Agreements have been signed with all the provinces concerned. The beneficial impact of those agreements can be seen and observed in our communities. For the next two years, $230 million has been allocated to solve this problem over the long term, although the method for doing so remains to be determined. This is a two-year commitment to the communities, workers, employers, and provinces and territories so that we can seriously focus together on how we will solve the black hole problem, as the prime minister has undertaken to do and as we have clearly demonstrated by including this $230 million item in budget 2018.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Minister, my question concerned the calculation of the unemployment rate.

I represent a riding that is experiencing full employment. Despite that fact, some workers hold seasonal employment in the agri-food sector, for example. The owner of a lawn maintenance business recently told me he had had to lend money to his employees. The employer spoke to me about the black hole his employees were in. He isn't interested in seeing his employees go to work in the plant next door, which is experiencing a labour shortage. He trained them and wants them to be available when the season starts. That's the labour market reality I'm talking about.

In a single region, you have, on the one hand, a situation of full employment and, on the other hand, seasonal workers and young people who move from job to job and are experiencing unstable employment.

We have to rethink the way the employment insurance program is currently designed. You're telling us you'll be announcing a reform, but when will that reform take place?

● (1340)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Sorry, we're well past the time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: The question has been asked.

[*English*]

The Chair: I do have to respect the minister's time. He does actually need to be on the move right now, but I wanted to thank him for coming back.

I ask our colleagues to stay put as the minister leaves. We're going to be bring back in the officials around Bill C-62.

While they're doing that, it's optional, but we can actually vote now on estimates to report back to the House. If we choose not to do that—

Hon. Steven Blaney: I believe we can suspend for two minutes.

The Chair: We don't have to. I'm just saying that we can go straight into the vote, or if we don't want to vote, that's fine as well.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Oh, it's for the main estimates.

The Chair: Yes, it's the main estimates.

CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

Vote 1 — Reimbursement under the provisions of the National Housing Act and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Act.....$2,427,435,894

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Vote 1 — Program expenditures.....$4,111,237

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Vote 1 — Operating expenditures.....$676,783,319

Vote 5 — Grants and contributions.....$2,439,760,218

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the votes on the main estimates 2018-19 to the House?

An hon. member: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much. That is complete.

Monsieur Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: During the minister's appearance, I asked him a question about the funding we have just approved, including that of the Canada Summer Jobs program. That's in the budget. We know that funding is allocated to organizations that support terrorist groups. I would like to secure a guarantee that taxpayers' money will not be used to fund terrorist groups.

I'm requesting your opinion, Mr. Chair. The question has been raised in committee. Can we ask the minister to come back to the committee and testify on that subject, or do you prefer that I do so in another way and contact the minister directly?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm not sure that.... We do have some time in the coming weeks. Maybe that's a thing we can discuss after, if you wish.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: All right.

[*English*]

The Chair: Pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, February 1, 2018, the committee is resuming clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-62, an act to amend the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Act and other acts.

We've discussed ahead of time that I'll be looking for unanimous consent to group clauses 1 through 8. Do I have that unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clauses 1 to 8 inclusive agreed to on division)

(On clause 9)

The Chair: Now we have clause 9. Can I have unanimous consent to group all three amendments, NDP-1, NDP-2, and NDP-3, together as they are the same thing?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: The purpose of the first amendment is to delete lines 16 and 17 on page 7.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Sansoucy, what we were asking for is if we had unanimous consent to group these three amendments together.

● (1345)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Yes, absolutely.

I have the text of the three amendments in my hand.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will vote on them all at once.

(Amendments negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Clause 9 agreed to on division)

Now I'd like to seek....

Madam Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Can we vote on unamended clause 9, please?

[*English*]

The Chair: It has been voted on.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I missed it, and I'm sorry about that. Personally, I voted for the amendment, but I didn't vote against the unamended clause 9.

I just want to be sure it's clear that I'm going to vote against the unamended clause 9.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will seek unanimous consent now to group clauses 10 through 36.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clauses 10 to 36 inclusive agreed to on division).

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Chair: Shall the bill carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed

Mr. Mark Warawa: On division.

The Chair: Shall the chair report the bill to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much, everybody.

I have just some future business notes here. The deadline for the 2018 Centennial Flame Research Award is Saturday, June 30, 2018. Feel free to promote the award by sharing the news release on your social media and in your riding.

I don't believe we have any other business today.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Chair, the only person who was not thanked for their hard work at this committee was you. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your hard work.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: I'll cry myself to sleep tonight thinking of that sentiment.

Mr. Mark Warawa: You were not forgotten.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Warawa.

The meeting is adjourned.

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